

CFAC must cap cyanide leak with

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Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. will have to install a synthetic liner over an old landfill that was pinpointed as the source of cyanide seepage into groundwater near the plant, a state

Water Quality Bureau official said this week.

CFAC has spent the last year and a half drilling and monitoring test wells to determine where the cyanide is coming from. Tests last summer pegged the cyanide level near the

landfill at .696 parts per million, more than three times the safe drinking water standard of .200 ppm. Originally, CFAC officials speculated the cyanide was coming from a waste pond where potliners were soaked until the late 1970s, but a series of test

synthetic liner, state says

wells now point to the landfill north of the pond as the real culprit, said Tim Byron, an environmental specialist with the state Water Quality Bureau.

Detection of the hazardous waste was difficult because traces of cya-

nide showed up in several places, including a major production well some distance from the landfill, Byron said. Tests eventually deduced that porous soil caused the cyanide to be drawn into wells as they were

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pumped.

"Now, the only thing they can do is eliminate the source," he said. That can most easily be done by capping the landfill.

A six-inch clay cap already in place will be left intact, Byron said, but CFAC must regrade 18 inches of

cover soil, apply coarse-textured material on top of the clay and install the synthetic liner.

"It's a good alternative, and it should eliminate the problem over time," said Don Ryan, laboratory superintendent at CFAC.

CFAC will submit a final project

design by next spring and the state is pushing to have the liner in by the fall of 1994.

To ensure CFAC will get the job done, the state is including the capping requirements in its drafts of surface water permits for the aluminum plant. Previously CFAC operated

with groundwater permits, but the state is requiring more stringent surface water permits, in part because of the close proximity of the plant to the Flathead River, Byron said.

Ryan said the new permits "will serve the same purpose" and shouldn't burden plant operations.

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